

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1-18 (Canceled)

19. (Currently amended) A system for managing an independent ~~franchise~~-supply chain comprising at least independent suppliers and independent ~~franchise~~-stores and an independent supply chain manager connected together by a network, comprising:

a memory connected to the network and storing supplier master contracts with the independent suppliers negotiated by the independent supply chain manager on behalf of the independent ~~franchise~~-stores and/or independent distributors, wherein each of a plurality of the supplier master contracts includes a term assigning directly or indirectly a different first set of the independent ~~franchise~~-stores to the independent supplier to which to supply directly or indirectly at least one item;

an independent supply chain manager computer system connected to the network and operatively connected to the memory and comprising one or more processors and including the following components

a component for storing a plurality of terms of the supplier master contracts in a supply chain electronic database accessible via the network;

~~a component for registering at least each of a plurality of the independent suppliers, and the independent franchise stores as one of at least two types comprising suppliers and stores, and maintaining a list of registered users accessible by the independent supply chain manager computer;~~

a component for defining a plurality of data types for ~~franchise~~-store sales data, each of the data types including a set of parameters;

a component for receiving ~~franchise~~-store sales data from a plurality of the independent ~~franchise~~-stores utilizing the network, the ~~franchise~~-store sales data comprising sales of goods by the independent ~~franchise~~-stores, wherein the sales of the goods are made manually ~~over a counter~~;

a component for verifying a format of the ~~franchise~~-store sales data against the parameters of the defined data types;

a component for automatically correcting discrepancies between the format of the data and the parameters of the defined data types by translating the format of the franchise-store sales data in accordance with the parameters of the defined data types;

a component for providing an electronic communication of or providing electronic access for one of the respective independent stores to an indication that changes have been made to the independent store sales data for the respective independent store ~~a component for automatically logging the discrepancies in an electronic log and providing electronic access to the electronic log or providing an electronic communication that includes information from the electronic log;~~

~~a component for the independent supply chain manager computer automatically obtaining franchise store sales data from a second set of the independent franchise stores, wherein the second set of independent franchise stores is determined, in part, by the supplier master contract associated with one of the independent suppliers and is equal to or less than the first set for that supplier master contract;~~

a component for the independent supply chain manager computer receiving data from the independent suppliers and/or independent franchise-stores and/or distributors utilizing the network, the data relating to the supply of the at least one item from the independent suppliers directly or indirectly to the independent franchise-stores;

a component for automatically comparing at least one contract term in one of the supplier master contracts for the at least one item to received data relating to the supply of the at least one item; and

a component for sending a communication to at least one of the independent franchise stores or to one of the independent suppliers if there is a discrepancy between the at least one contract term and the received data; and

~~a component for providing an interface accessible on the network to allow access of the one of the independent suppliers to the franchise store sales data from the second set of independent franchise stores and/or data derived therefrom.~~

20. (Currently Amended) The system as defined in claim 19, further comprising:

a component for the independent supply chain manager computer automatically obtaining store sales data from a second set of the independent stores, wherein the second set of independent stores is determined, in part, by the supplier master contract associated directly or indirectly with the second set of independent stores;

a component for registering at least each of a plurality of the independent suppliers, and the independent stores as one of at least two types comprising suppliers and stores, and maintaining a list of registered users accessible by the independent supply chain manager computer;

wherein the ~~franchise~~-store sales data is obtained in mid-promotion from the second set of the independent ~~franchise~~-stores associated with one of the supplier master contracts, wherein the second set of independent ~~franchise~~-stores is less than the first set of the independent ~~franchise~~-stores associated with the supplier master contract;

a component in the supply chain manager computer using sampling to determine based on this mid-promotion ~~franchise~~-store sales data from the second set of the independent ~~franchise~~-stores predicted sales for the remainder of the promotion for the first set of the independent ~~franchise~~-stores assigned by the supplier master contract to the one of the independent suppliers; and

a component for generating a communication or making accessible via the network to at least one of the registered users data based on the predicted sales for the first set of the independent ~~franchise~~-stores.

21. (Currently Amended) The system as defined in claim 19, further comprising:

a component for the independent supply chain manager computer automatically obtaining store sales data from a second set of the independent stores, wherein the second set of independent stores is determined, in part, by the supplier master contract associated directly or indirectly with the second set of independent stores;

registering each of a plurality of the independent suppliers, and the independent stores as one of at least two types comprising suppliers and stores, and maintaining a list of registered users accessible by the independent supply chain manager computer;

wherein the ~~franchise~~-store sales data from the second set of the independent ~~franchise~~ stores associated with one of the supplier master contracts is less than the first set of the independent ~~franchise~~-stores associated with the supplier master contract;

a component in the supply chain manager computer using sampling to determine based on the ~~franchise~~-store sales data from the second set of the independent ~~franchise~~-stores associated with one of the supplier master contracts predicted sales for the first set of the independent ~~franchise~~-stores assigned by the supplier master contract to one of the independent suppliers; and

a component for generating a communication or making accessible via the network to at least one of the registered users data based on the predicted sales for the first set of the independent ~~franchise~~-stores.

22. (Currently Amended) The system as defined in claim 19, further comprising a component in the supply chain manager computer forecasting aggregated future sales of a one of the different first sets of independent ~~franchise~~-stores utilizing the ~~franchise~~ store sales data for selected ones of the independent ~~franchise~~-stores; and

a component in the supply chain manager computer generating a communication or providing electronic access utilizing the network to the forecast of aggregated future sales of the first set of the independent ~~franchise~~-stores to the independent supplier for that first set.

23. (Currently Amended) The system as defined in claim 22, further comprising a component in the supply chain manager computer converting the ~~franchise~~-store sales data for the sales of goods into items supplied by the independent supplier and aggregating the items supplied based on the first set of independent ~~franchise~~-stores assigned directly or indirectly to one of the independent suppliers.

24. (Previously presented) The system as defined in claim 22, further comprising a component for automatically generating an electronic order form based on the forecast of aggregated future sales for ordering items from one of the independent suppliers; and

a component for automatically electronically communicating the electronic order form.

25. (Previously presented) The system as defined in claim 19, further comprising a component for allowing entry of a growth value into a field in a web page associated with the independent supply chain manager; and

a component for electronically calculating a projected parameter associated with one of the supply chain participants based at least in part on the growth value.

26. (Currently Amended) The system as defined in claim 19, further comprising a component for registering at least each of a plurality of the independent suppliers, and the independent stores as one of at least two types comprising suppliers and stores, and

maintaining a list of registered users accessible by the independent supply chain manager computer;

wherein the group comprises independent ~~franchise~~-stores grouped by a ~~franchise~~ store characteristic other than a region or direct or indirect assignment by master supplier contract and determining benchmark data for independent ~~franchise~~-stores with that characteristic;

a component for electronically comparing the benchmark data to the data for one of the independent ~~franchise~~-stores having that characteristic to obtain comparison data; and

a component for generating a communication or providing electronic access via the network to the comparison data to one of the registered users.

27. (Currently Amended) The system as defined in claim 19, further comprising a component for determining a charge for access to the independent ~~franchise~~-store sales data to one of the independent suppliers based on a number of accesses to the supply chain electronic database by the independent supplier.

28. (Previously presented) The system as defined in claim 19, further comprising a component for determining a charge for electronic advertising on the network.

29. (Currently amended) A program product for managing an independent ~~franchise~~ supply chain comprising at least independent suppliers and independent ~~franchise~~-stores and an independent supply chain manager with an independent supply chain manager computer connected together by a network, comprising:

a computer useable medium having computer-readable program code embodied thereon which, when executed by a computer, causes the computer to perform the following method

storing a plurality of terms of supplier master contracts with independent suppliers in a supply chain electronic database accessible via the network, wherein the terms of the master supplier contracts were negotiated by the independent supply chain manager on behalf of the independent ~~franchise~~-stores and/or independent distributors, wherein each of a plurality of the supplier master contracts includes a term assigning directly or indirectly a different first set of the independent ~~franchise~~-stores to the independent supplier to which to supply directly or indirectly at least one item;

~~registering each of a plurality of the independent suppliers, and the independent franchise stores as one of at least two types comprising suppliers and stores, and maintaining a list of registered users accessible by the independent supply chain manager computer;~~

defining a plurality of data types for franchise-store sales data, each of the data types including a set of parameters;

receiving franchise-store sales data from a plurality of the independent franchise stores utilizing the network, the franchise-store sales data comprising sales of goods by the independent franchise stores, wherein the sales of the goods are made manually over a counter;

verifying a format of the franchise-store sales data against the parameters of the defined data types;

automatically correcting discrepancies between the format of the data and the parameters of the defined data types by translating the format of the franchise-store sales data in accordance with the parameters of the defined data types;

providing an electronic communication of or providing electronic access for one of the respective independent stores to an indication that changes have been made to the independent store sales data for the respective independent store data; ~~automatically logging the discrepancies in an electronic log and providing electronic access to the electronic log or providing an electronic communication that includes information from the electronic log;~~

~~the independent supply chain manager computer automatically obtaining franchise store sales data from a second set of the independent franchise stores, wherein the second set of independent franchise stores is determined, in part, by the supplier master contract associated with one of the independent suppliers and is equal to or less than the first set for that supplier master contract;~~

the independent supply chain manager computer receiving data from the independent suppliers and/or independent franchise stores and/or distributors utilizing the network, the data relating to the supply of the at least one item from the independent suppliers directly or indirectly to the independent franchise stores;

automatically comparing at least one contract term in one of the supplier master contracts for the at least one item to received data relating to the supply of the at least one item; and

sending a communication to at least one of the independent ~~franchise~~-stores or to one of the independent suppliers if there is a discrepancy between the at least one contract term and the received data;

~~providing an interface accessible on the network to allow access of the one of the independent suppliers to the franchise store sales data from the second set of independent franchise stores and/or data derived therefrom.~~

30. (Currently Amended) The program product as defined in claim 29, further comprising program code for:

the independent supply chain manager computer automatically obtaining store sales data from a second set of the independent stores, wherein the second set of independent stores is determined, in part, by the supplier master contract associated directly or indirectly with the second set of independent stores;

registering each of a plurality of the independent suppliers, and the independent stores as one of at least two types comprising suppliers and stores, and maintaining a list of registered users accessible by the independent supply chain manager computer;

wherein the ~~franchise~~-store sales data is obtained in mid-promotion from the second set of the independent ~~franchise~~-stores associated with one of the supplier master contracts, wherein the second set of independent ~~franchise~~-stores is less than the first set of the independent ~~franchise~~-stores associated with the supplier master contract;

the supply chain manager computer using sampling to determine based on this mid-promotion ~~franchise~~-store sales data from the second set of the independent ~~franchise~~-stores predicted sales for the remainder of the promotion for the first set of the independent ~~franchise~~-stores assigned by the supplier master contract to the one of the independent suppliers; and

generating a communication or making accessible via the network to at least one of the registered users data based on the predicted sales for the first set of the independent ~~franchise~~ stores.

31. (Currently Amended) The program product as defined in claim 29, further comprising program code for:

the independent supply chain manager computer automatically obtaining store sales data from a second set of the independent stores, wherein the second set of independent stores

is determined, in part, by the supplier master contract associated directly or indirectly with the second set of independent stores;

registering each of a plurality of the independent suppliers, and the independent stores as one of at least two types comprising suppliers and stores, and maintaining a list of registered users accessible by the independent supply chain manager computer;

wherein the ~~franchise~~-store sales data from the second set of the independent ~~franchise~~ stores associated with one of the supplier master contracts is less than the first set of the independent ~~franchise~~-stores associated with the supplier master contract;

the supply chain manager computer using sampling to determine based on the ~~franchise~~-store sales data from the second set of the independent ~~franchise~~-stores associated with one of the supplier master contracts predicted sales for the first set of the independent ~~franchise~~-stores assigned by the supplier master contract to one of the independent suppliers; and

generating a communication or making accessible via the network to at least one of the registered users data based on the predicted sales for the first set of the independent ~~franchise~~-stores.

32. (Currently Amended) The program product as defined in claim 29, further comprising the supply chain manager computer forecasting aggregated future sales of a one of the different first sets of independent ~~franchise~~-stores utilizing the ~~franchise~~-store sales data for selected ones of the independent ~~franchise~~-stores; and

the supply chain manager computer generating a communication or providing electronic access utilizing the network to the forecast of aggregated future sales of the first set of the independent ~~franchise~~-stores to the independent supplier for that first set.

33. (Currently Amended) The program product as defined in claim 32, further comprising the supply chain manager computer converting the ~~franchise~~-store sales data for the sales of goods into items supplied by the independent supplier and aggregating the items supplied based on the first set of independent ~~franchise~~-stores assigned directly or indirectly to one of the independent suppliers.

34. (Previously presented) The program product as defined in claim 32, further comprising

automatically generating an electronic order form based on the forecast of aggregated future sales for ordering items from one of the independent suppliers; and
automatically electronically communicating the electronic order form.

35. (Previously presented) The program product as defined in claim 29, further comprising

allowing entry of a growth value into a field in a web page associated with the independent supply chain manager; and

electronically calculating a projected parameter associated with one of the supply chain participants based at least in part on the growth value.

36. (Currently Amended) The program product as defined in claim 29, further comprising program code for

registering at least each of a plurality of the independent suppliers, and the independent stores as one of at least two types comprising suppliers and stores, and maintaining a list of registered users accessible by the independent supply chain manager computer;

wherein the group comprises independent ~~franchise~~-stores grouped by a ~~franchise~~ store characteristic other than a region or direct or indirect assignment by master supplier contract and determining benchmark data for independent ~~franchise~~-stores with that characteristic;

electronically comparing the benchmark data to the data for one of the independent ~~franchise~~-stores having that characteristic to obtain comparison data; and

generating a communication or providing electronic access via the network to the comparison data to one of the registered users.

37. (Currently Amended) The program product as defined in claim 29, further comprising determining a charge for access to the independent ~~franchise~~-store sales data to one of the independent suppliers based on a number of accesses to the supply chain electronic database by the independent supplier.

38. (Previously presented) The program product as defined in claim 29, further comprising determining a charge for electronic advertising on the network.

39. (Currently Amended) The system defined in claim 19, further comprising:
a component for electronically associating each of a plurality of the independent ~~franchise~~-stores to at least one group based on a characteristic of the independent ~~franchise~~ store, wherein the group comprises less than all of the independent ~~franchise~~-stores; and
a component for providing an interface accessible on the network to allow access by each of the plurality of the independent ~~franchise~~-stores to data relating to at least one supplier master contract associated directly or indirectly with that independent ~~franchise~~-store and to data relating to independent ~~franchise~~-stores in the group.

40. (Previously presented) The program product as defined in claim 29, further comprising code for performing the following:
electronically associating each of a plurality of the independent stores to at least one group based on a characteristic of the independent store, wherein the group comprises less than all of the independent stores; and
providing an interface accessible on the network to allow access by each of the plurality of the independent stores to data relating to at least one supplier master contract associated directly or indirectly with that independent store and to data relating to independent stores in the group.

41. (New) The system as defined in claim 19, wherein the component for providing an electronic communication of or providing electronic access for one of the respective independent stores to an indication that changes have been made to the independent store sales data for the respective independent store comprises a component for automatically logging the discrepancies in an electronic log and providing electronic access to the electronic log or providing an electronic communication that includes information from the electronic log.

42. (New) The program product as defined in claim 29, wherein the program code for providing an electronic communication of or providing electronic access for one of the respective independent stores to an indication that changes have been made to the

independent store sales data for the respective independent store comprises program code for automatically logging the discrepancies in an electronic log and providing electronic access to the electronic log or providing an electronic communication that includes information from the electronic log.